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The Criminal's Triumph

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A: Prof Prabhu Shankara

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1955

THE CRIMINAL'S

TRIUMPH

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1955

THE CRIMINAL'S TRIUMPH

Prabhu Shankara

CHETANA PUSTAKALAYA
MYSORE

First Edition : August 1955

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A Word of Warning.

Fools rush in where Angels fear to tread is an old adage, which, it is good to remember always. But evidently the King and the Ministers of the small nameless, moneyless state either did not know this, or knowing, yet knew not. So they rushed in to punish a crime — and they had to pay heavily for being judges. 'Judge not, lest ye be judged' became too true, too early with them.

Such is the world created by Sri. Prabhushankar in this play, a world standing on the borderline between the real and the imaginary. The powerless powers of Europe peopled by millions, yet impotent against evil and the powerful world of our dreams peopled by a few, yet strong and virile — these sandwich the world of drama—a state with a king, ministers and people, strong in their innocence, but weak in their finance. An unprecedented crime takes place and...A word of warning to you;do not expect anything to happen, because you will surely be disappointed. So, warm up and participate in the criminal's triumph. I am sure it is the author's triumph and in more than one way, yours too.

15-8-1955 **S. Anantha Narayana**

Author's Interruption.

Mischief is like a snow-ball; set it rolling, it gathers momentum and mass. Otherwise this play would not have been published today.

Some friends of mine wanted a new play in English for the stage. In response, an old story I had read a couple of years ago emerged and took the present dramatic form. It is a story from the West and it is regrettable that I cannot, at this lapse of time recall the author's name. I thank that literary inspiration.

My friends Sris A. Venkataram, K. B. Prabhu Prasad and A. Subba Rao have come forward courageously to publish this play. I warmly thank them for their affection.

I am under a deep debt of gratitude to my teacher and friend Sri S. Anantha Narayana, for the enthusiasm with which he has gone through the type script, offered valuable suggestions that have been incorporated here and for his loving 'Word of Warning'.

15-8-1955 **Prabhu Shankara**

The Criminal's Triumph

To be announced from behind the Screen

It was a small state in Europe, with a very meagre income. Once, for the first time in its history a great catastrophe occurred and threw the king and his cabinet into consternation, as this was the first time in their life they had to face any problem.

SCENE I

[The curtain rises showing the cabinet meeting in full swing, the king wildly walking to and fro.]

King: It is atrocious! Neither I, nor my fourteen fore-fathers had ever heard of such a crime on the sacred soil of this state. Had you or any of your fore-fathers ever heard of such a crime here — on this sacred soil?

All: No Your Highness: No Your Highness.

King: But now we have. Which devil on earth could have committed this?

Home-Minister: Not a devil, Your Highness, but a man, a man of our town.

King: A man!....A man of our town! Are you sure? *Then* why blink like an idiot? Why not hunt him out? Unleash our hounds, let them have a good feast over that cannibal. (Suddenly stops!) No - I am sorry. I am sorry, the dogs never kill a man - do they? - No - Then find him out, rush up, I do not care by what means, but find him out you should.

Minister: There is not the least trouble on that account Your Highness. The first person he called on immediately after the murder was committed was myself. He murders the person, knocks at my door, washes the blood off his hands in my own wash-basin and accosts me and says—'Here, arrest me on the spot at once! A moment's delay or looking that way or this, you shall follow my first victim!'

King: Murders and reports himself! Strange. He must be mad. Then why don't you send him to some University?

Minister: Excuse me Your Highness. He looks anything but mad. On the contrary he appears to be wiser than most of us.

King: Must be, must be. Otherwise he would

have found himself in your place here, much earlier. That accounts for it. Well, what did you do with him?

Minister: I have locked him up, Your Highness.

King: Locked him up? We never had such a thing as a lock-up. Where could you find one?

Minister: I used a little sense Your Highness– and . . .

King: Used it up? What will you do for the rest of your life? Well, proceed.

Minister: . . . and I secretly ordered my people to escape to the neighbouring house through the back door and I myself escaped through the front one, while my attendants locked both the doors allowing that person to rot there.

King: So . . . you have converted your house into a lock-up. That is good. Let that be the permanent lock-up hereafter!

Minister: The security of the state vehemently demands that this evil element should be destroyed at once, Your Highness.

King: (Looking at the Minister for Law) What is the verdict of the Law on this most

heinous of the sins committed in human society?

Law Minister: The sacred Law-books of our state are unbearably silent on this issue, Your Highness, as the imagination of our fore-fathers, the compilers of these law-books, could never stretch to see that a man could smoothly kill his neighbour.

King: (with evident impatience) Fools, f o o l s – Frogs of the well. Did you not have the sense to study what the huge books of law of other countries say about this?

Minister: I had, your Highness! And the law-books of the civilised nations unanimously agree that a person of the type under consideration should be sentenced to death.

King: Then sentence him to death!

Law Minister: But our lawbooks and t h e i r amendments . . .

King: Burn them all ! That does'nt matter. But before that august ceremony sentence this person to death. That is my command. This is *my* state. And every dog here should obey *my* command. N o w run. Carry out the commands and report later.

[The Curtain falls when all bow before the King]

SCENE II

A few days later . . .

[The curtain rises showing the King pacing the hall up and down like a wild animal, while the Ministers stand bending their heads down.]

King: Stupid, stupid, this is the height of stupidity, imbecility and what not? Could not kill a person, could not find a means proper. And with you to rule a state! Well, you honourable sirs, could you not find a rope and a tree yonder to hang him high?

Minister: No, your Highness . . .

King: What, you could not find a rope or a tree! I shall find them for *you*.

Law minister: No, Your Highness - That is not the problem. From the point of view of maintaining the esteem of our world-renowned state we cannot resort to that barbaric way of killing a person. No doubt the person hangs high, but so high that the whole world can read there that our civilization has not progressed beyond the 10th century, of course, A.D...

King: True. I agree with you on this point. I even commend you for it. But what

about that wonderful giant of a machine we have heard of – the Guillotine. They say that it beheads a person as smoothly as an apple is cut. Why don't we get that?

Minister for Foreign Affairs: We wrote to France for that, Your Highness.

King: The right place. They are the past-masters in the art of handling that. You can even get a French-man with that. He can clear the whole state in a day and get away with his fee.

Minister: But, your Highness . . .

King: (with impatience for a moment) Pray, tell me can't you manage without your 'but' and 'Your Highness'. (After cooling down) Of course you cannot. Well, tell me about the 'but' of it.

Minister: But, your Highness, they demand 15000 francs for lending the machine for a day. they write that it includes the transportation charges too.

King: 15000 francs a day! Born enemies of hierarchy! Robbers! Leave them there. But why not write to Germany?

Minister: Thier reply evokes sympathy, your Highness. In the recent wars they used all

their available weapons against the enemies in their desperate attempts and now they are hard pressed even for knives and forks to cut their loaves!

King: Poor friends! Did you not think of Russia at all?

Minister: I did, Your Highness. But they send us a thousand copies of their manifesto, free of charge, Your Highness, and add only one line in reply giving us a lesson on economy. They want us to send our prisoner They promise to dispose off the criminal in a suitable way!

King: Ah – I found out the secret. They want to add one solid member to the fast dwindling number of their brotherhood. Never. As long as there is a single drop of blue, blue blood in my body I will never contribute a single soul, or body to that country! No! No!

Minister: As a last resort we wrote to America too, Your Highness.

King: Wonderful! Genius! You have struck the most resourceful of places. I have heard of their most miraculous ways of sending a person to death. Make a person

sit on a chair, give him a cup of coffee or Ovaltine if he prefers that and switch on. Done. Why, they say it kills even the soul and why speak of the body. Get that, get that, at any cost.

Finance minister: I have all objection to that, Your Highness. The cost that they have roughly estimated for this will be the state income of fifteen years to come. It is impracticable Your Highness.

King: The state income of fifteen years! The most exploiting nation on earth. Why, they talk as if every person there is born with an electric chair with him Let all these nations go to hell. No – why disturb hell? (Walks up and down moodily. All of a sudden jumps with a flash) Here, here, we must be having fifty strong soldiers that are guarding our state. Order them to kill him.

Defence minister: In fact they were ordered, Your Highness. But they refuse!

King: What nonsense! Refused! Disobedience in the army of my state. Unimaginable :

Minister: Not exactly disobedience, Your Highness. They say they were never taught to kill. They have never had the

opportunity of facing a battle and as such know neither to kill nor to be killed. They frankly confess that the only use for the swords they have found throughout their lives is cutting vegetables at home !

King: (Falling back on his chair helplessly) Is there not a single ray of hope in the midst of this stark darkness? 039893

Law-Minister: There is, Your Highness. The books of law suggest an alternative. When we can not sentence a man to death we can sentence him to life.

King: What do you mean by that ?

Minister: It is very simple, Your Highness. We have to lock him up till he dies of his own accord, permanent imprisonment. We have to give him little food, never allow anybody to visit him, keep him aloof. He dies soon.

King: Ideal: Then sentence him to life. That is my command.

All: Sure, Your Hignness.

[Curtain]

SCENE III

After a few weeks . . .

[Curtain rises showing the King and the Ministers in a state of panic.]

Minister: The monster is out, Your Highness. He is knocking at the door and insists on meeting us.

King: But tell me as to what happened, how is he out? What has enraged him?

Minister: We appointed a sentry to guard him. But his boarding charges and the salary of the sentry were too high for the state to bear. That told on the palace budget to a great extent as Your Highness knows. Then the ministry in a special meeting decided to dismiss the sentry. It was done. But the criminal would not run away.

King: O Lord. He would not escape! But would continue to eat like a wolf.

Minister: Yes, Your Highness. That was too much for us. At long last as a last measure we decided to communicate to the prisoner that he is expelled from the state and this is what has happened. He is

threatening to smash the doors if we don't let him in to see us. We await your command Your Highness.

King: The command, the command, the command! You await the command only at the time of peirl. Well let him in and save the doors.

Minister: Yes, Your Highness. (He signs to the guard standing in a corner, who accordingly brings in the sturdy prisoner.)

Prisoner: (Making a formal bow to the King) I appeal to the sense of justice of Your Highness. I want one thing on earth and that is redress.

King: You murderer! Think of the infinite mercy that has been shown to you. You ought to have been hunted like a mad dog in the streets for the heinous crime you have committed. We have pardoned you and still you prattle of redress.

Prisoner: That is exactly the injustice that has been done to me. Death is the reward for murder. You have deprived me of that. I knew you and your valiant ministers could never dare do such a thing. Well, you sentenced me to life. That

was something – you gave me a comfortable lodging and an obedient sentry who would sweep my room, wash my clothes and would walk up to the palace at regular hours and carry my food. Your rickety budget would not permit a peon for me. You dismissed him. Well, I had pity for you and had tolerated that. I thought I would be healthier with a little more exercise beside the gardening and then attended to all my personal services myself. *I would walk to the palace myself four times a day* and would eat the poor-food they gave me there. At nights I would lock my doors and had even to do the guarding. I put up with everything. And now, all of a sudden your ministry commands me to quit the state. This is the height of injustice! It is atrocious! No, I am not moving an inch till I am assured of my rights as a murderer. If needs be I shall report the matter to the Security Council of the U N O.

King: (Aside to the Minister) What is the Security Council of the U N O?

Criminal: (In a loud voice) What is the conspiracy against me? I protest.

Minister: What is the Security Council of the U N O?

Criminal: That is hell. Why bother about that? The moment I inform the U N O the whole world-army marches on your state, like an elephant on a child's toy-house and then you will regret this. (The King and the Ministers whisper something among themselves.)

Minister: You will kindly stay out for a few minutes till we come to a decision on this important issue.

Criminal: I shall. Borrow a little sense and come to a sane decision. Remember not to invite my dagger to kiss your hearts. (He walks out)

King: Shameful. We are at the mercy of a murderer. Shameful. But we have to get rid of this dog somehow.

Minister: Let us refuse to do anything for him.

Another Minister: But his dagger kissing our hearts . . .

Another: And the world army marching on our heads . . .

King: Shut up. I would rather dismiss every one of you and be happy with him in your office---But a minister with a dagger and

mastery over the art of making it kiss the heart of others is always a danger to the state as such. Well, now let us decide soon.

Minister: There is only one way open to us at present and that is . . .

King: And that is to run away from the state in disguise.

Minister: No, Your Highness. We shall offer him a little money for his expenses and shall expel him from our state.

King: Supposing he does not agree . . .

Minister: We have to persuade him to agree, Your Highness. Otherwise if we go on feeding that wolf of a criminal we are sure to become bankrupt.

All the rest: Yes your Highness. That is the only way. We have to get rid of him at any cost.

King: I agree. (To the guard) Let him in.

(The criminal walks in majestically and takes a chair)

Minister: Listen to the generous judgment of the most merciful of the kings, you Satan's son, listen. You, the Criminal, have been from this date expelled from our sacred state, which you shall never again enter with life. As a token of

mercy of our beloved Highness you get an allowance of 50 francs on the first of every month, which you shall receive at our boundary.

Criminal: To hell with your 50 francs. I am a murderer and not a beggar. I would have never cared to soil my dagger for this 50 francs, which would not fetch even one meal a day. To hell with that I said.

Minister: Not a cent more, we declare.

Criminal: Well, I will broadcast this to the whole world. The whole world will know that yours is a state without means to feed one noble murderer-only one of the kind in its history.

King: Let the dog stop barking and quote its demand.

Criminal: 500 I would have said. But you are poor. Let me manage with a hundred, to be paid in advance.

King: Let it be so. But I should not see your dirty face a moment more, nor should my subjects.

(The criminal observes the blank faces of the King and his ministers, bows and goes singing - Long live the King, Long live the state and God bless the King.)

(Curtain)

THE END

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